



Morning Alert - Wednesday, February 15, 2017

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All TV networks gave extensive top play to reports by South Korean media that Kim Jong Nam, the half-brother of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, was apparently assassinated at a Malaysian airport on Monday. He was reportedly poisoned by two DPRK agents who fled the scene.

Top stories in national dailies included Toshiba's announcement on Tuesday that it incurred a 499.9 billion yen net loss from April through December due to a 712.5 billion yen impairment charge on its nuclear operations (Asahi, Mainichi, Nikkei); the resignation of National Security Adviser Flynn (Yomiuri); and the apparent assassination of Kim Jong Nam (Sankei).

INTERNATIONAL

U.S., Japan eye visit to Tokyo by Vice President Pence in April

Sankei wrote that the governments of the U.S. and Japan are making arrangements for Vice President Pence to visit Japan in April for a bilateral economic dialogue he will co-chair with Deputy Prime minister Aso. Noting that the Vice President has many acquaintances in the Japanese business community, the paper wrote that Japanese business circles are hoping that Vice President Pence will visit Japan as early as the end of March and the Vice President is considering the plan positively.

GOJ responds calmly to Flynn's resignation

All papers reported extensively on National Security Adviser Flynn's resignation on Monday, speculating that the departure of the key security advisor will deal a blow to the Trump administration.

Asahi quoted a Kantei official as saying that Flynn's resignation is disappointing because Abe administration officials, including Secretary General Yachi of the National Security Secretariat, had developed personal relationships with him. However, there is a view within the GOJ that his resignation will have little impact on Japan's relations with the U.S. because Prime Minister Abe spent two days with President Trump and agreed to establish a new economic dialogue co-chaired by Vice President Pence and Deputy Prime Minister Aso. The paper quoted a GOJ official as saying that Secretary of Defense Mattis will be in charge of the Trump administration's security policy as a result of Flynn's departure from the administration, and this will probably produce good results.

Mainichi and Yomiuri wrote that Flynn played a major role in the U.S. acknowledgement that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty covers the Senkaku Islands and the two nations' response to China and North Korea in the joint statement issued after the U.S.-Japan summit. The papers wrote that the GOJ responded calmly to the resignation of Flynn, quoting Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga as stating at a news conference on Tuesday that there will be no practical impact on Japan because the solid alliance with the U.S. was confirmed at the recent summit meeting. Mainichi wrote that Tokyo will watch closely to see whether Flynn's departure will affect the Trump administration's moves to improve ties with Russia.

Abe stresses significance of strong bond with President Trump

All papers reported extensively on Prime Minister Abe's remarks at a Lower House Budget Committee session on Tuesday, which focused on the premier's summit meeting with President Trump. Asahi and Nikkei wrote that Abe stated that establishing and demonstrating to the world close relations with President Trump is the only option for him as Japan's prime minister to deal with the deteriorating security environment, including North Korean nuclear and missile threats. Abe made the remark in response to a question from Democratic Party lawmaker Maehara asking whether the premier had considered the risk of Japan being criticized in the international community for its leader being too close to the U.S. President who issued a controversial executive order on immigration. Abe added that he will serve as a bridge between world leaders by conveying President Trump's thinking to those who have concerns about him, while conveying their concerns to the President in order to prevent schisms from arising in the global community.

Nikkei wrote that the prime minister disclosed during the Diet session that he told the President that dealing with China will be the biggest challenge of this century, adding that it is necessary for Japan to strengthen its alliance with the U.S. to deal with China. Abe did not elaborate further, but the paper said he probably discussed with the President China's increasing activities in the South and East China Seas and its military buildup. The dailies also wrote that Abe disclosed that he tried to get the President to understand that Japan's auto market has no trade barriers.

Tuesday evening papers also reported on Abe's remarks at the Diet session. Concerning the possibility of the U.S. and Japan holding bilateral FTA negotiations, Abe said that although the U.S.

made no specific requests during the summit, Japan would not be reluctant to hold a bilateral FTA with the U.S., adding that Japan will move forward with bilateral talks if they serve its national interests. Concerning the TPP agreement, the prime minister stated that he repeatedly explained to the President the significance of the regional trade agreement, adding that President Trump apparently understood the importance of establishing free and fair trade rules in the region. With regard to his joint statement with President Trump, which stated that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty covers the Senkaku Islands, Abe stated that it will no longer be necessary to reconfirm that the islands fall within the scope of the bilateral treaty.

UNSC issues press statement condemning North Korean missile launch

Most papers wrote that the UN Security Council released a press statement on Monday condemning North Korea for defying its resolutions by conducting another ballistic missile test on Sunday. Calling the launch a “grave violation” of past UN resolutions, the council warned of “further significant measures” against the DPRK.

SECURITY

Abe says ending Futenma operations in 2019 to be difficult

Nikkei wrote that Prime Minister Abe stated during a Lower House Budget Committee meeting on Tuesday that it will probably be difficult to achieve the GOJ plan to end operations at MCAS Futenma by February 2019. The premier said that Okinawa Governor Onaga has not been cooperative at all in the relocation of the Futenma base.

ECONOMY

LDP lawmakers express concern about possible U.S.-Japan FTA talks

Sankei wrote that at a meeting on Tuesday of the LDP’s Foreign Affairs Division, most of the participants welcomed the outcome of the recent U.S.-Japan summit, but some lawmakers expressed concern over the U.S.-Japan joint statement’s reference to discussions on a bilateral trade framework. According to the paper, some of the participants stated that holding FTA talks with the U.S. would not be wise because Japan may be forced to accept additional demands from the U.S. in bilateral negotiations.

